LIFE IN THE FOLDS

HENRI MICHAUX

TRANSLATED BY DARREN JACKSON

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TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

Henri Michaux actively pursued the destruction of the narrative of his life, burning every letter he received and demanding that his correspondents do the same. Between Jean-Pierre Martin's excellent biography, *Henri Michaux*, and Michaux's own biographical sketch, "Some Information Regarding Fifty-Nine Years of Existence," we know that Henri Michaux was born in Belgium in 1899 to a comfortable family, and that at the age of nineteen he departed on the first of many voyages as a member of the Merchant Marines under the name Michaud. There are photographs of him and T. S. Eliot, André Gide, and Vladimir Nabokov, but he would not permit any photos to be published, either with his books or in the papers. He would likely be outraged by Gallimard's current paperback design, where each book presents a black-and-white portrait of its author. His first book of poems, *Qui je fus* (Who I was), was published in 1927. He met Marie-Louise Termet, at that time going by the name of Marie-Louise Ferdière, and her husband, Dr. Gaston Ferdière, in Paris in 1935, and often visited them when not traveling. She fell in love with him and eventually they began having an affair. They were married in 1943 in Paris, where she died on 19 February 1948. Michaux also died in Paris, on 19 October 1984. *Life in the Folds*, published in 1949, follows two major events in his life: World War II (imagery of which occurs frequently in *Life in the Folds*), and the death of Marie-Louise.

Although Michaux's work often seems to defy any comparison to biographical or historical events, many critics read this defiance not as a refusal to deal with the historical situation of his life, but as a means of indirect address. As Richard Ellmann puts it, "Reading Michaux makes one uncomfortable. The world of his poems bears some relation to that of the everyday, but it is hard to determine what."[1] His myth-making suggests the world we know, but in such a way that it is unrecognizable. His early works often presented imaginary characters or ethnographies, people and places that, strictly speaking, are entirely impossible. *Life in the Folds* contains some magical, imaginary cultures, but there's a key shift, as his oddities appear frequently to be a part of normal experience.

His assault on reality begins with the conception of self as singular and often involves images of surgery, torture, or combat. This vivisection of the psyche reveals a multivalent self, composed of many different elements that include the body and its constituent parts. Both the physical and the intangible suffer, and there is no hierarchy of suffering in his work, as reality is an extension of the self and its relations (both to itself and to others). In this way, the world is what the author/creator makes of it. The paradox is evident, as "Never Imagine" warns us to be wary of one's own tools: "If it's exciting in the 'I-you,' it's terrible in the 'You-me,' or even in the 'I-me,' if you're weak enough to let yourself be accosted, which can happen. Oh, how easily it happens! Watch out! It's done! Let go! Let go, I say!" But it is too late for both the speaker and the reader. Engaging myth as reality, Michaux's imaginary becomes a trap he cannot will away the way he willed his strange world into being.

The prominence of historical violence and personal loss in *Life in the Folds* may explain why Armand Hoog argues that after *Un certain Plume* (1930), Michaux lost his taste for humor.[2] Though he wrote a few books between *Un certain Plume* and *Life in the Folds*, Michaux's humor grew much darker in the years following World War II and the loss of his wife. An example from the section "Indescribable Places" describes the flight of a crowd of flayed people: "Danger! Danger! they yell at you, wandering pieces of steak with hunted looks." The scene reminds us of the Holocaust, of crowds of emaciated prisoners herded toward an unspeakable death. Nor is this presentation of violence unique to *Life in the Folds*: Take the "Hacs" from *Voyage en Grand Garabagne* (Voyage to Great Garban, 1936), for example. Their culture centers around violent public spectacles, of such great variety that they are referred to by number: "It's easy to introduce some savage beasts into a city (there are plenty of them in the outskirts). From out of a traffic jam suddenly come three or four black panthers who, though beside themselves, can endure the most painful wounds. This is Spectacle Number 72."[3] One struggles to connect such organized violence with the world we know, even in societies like ours, troubled by school shootings and home invasions; the violence of *Life in the Folds* strikes us even more directly. Where the earlier books present a solitary traveler crossing strange lands whose violence remains at a distance, the presentation of the Meidosems in *Life in the Folds* depends on the appearance of the exotic at home, in mirrors, walls, or the sky, and on the irony of observing them as part of a normal day: "Indeed, Meidosems constantly fall from the sky."

In a large sense, the trauma of *Life in the Folds* is exacerbated by the lack of power in moments of loss. Consider "The Trepanned

Patient," where a head injury renders an individual incapable of caring for himself: "once a man is truly speechless, one has to wait for others to be less so. They're busy, all too busy with you. As they say, 'they intervene.'" The goodwill of others makes the situation worse. Their "intervention" thwarts any possible will on the part of the victim, whose identity is diminished to the status of "patient," replete with its insinuation of *patience*. The loss of agency in moments of trauma is a theme that underlies much of the book and contextualizes some of the more disturbing images. In "Strange Situations," we find "a man shoving his wife into the clay of an embankment with great kicks of his leg. The embankment closed quietly over her." Here the people of an entire nation are rendered foreign, and in this context no one has the power to alter his or her situation; only the dead are free, but in dying take something more from the living who seem to have lost everything else. Later, in "Old Age of Pollagoras," Michaux makes a surprisingly autobiographical statement: "She fell into Death. Suddenly. Without any consent." In 1945, Marie-Louise Michaux became sick with pneumothorax, and had to move to a sanatorium in Cambo-les-Bains. In January 1948, she had just returned home, and she and Michaux were planning a voyage for Egypt. Michaux traveled to Brussels to complete the sale of the family home, and during his absence, Marie-Louise's nightgown caught fire. She tried to open the window but fell out. She was badly injured, but toward the middle of February she seemed to be recovering. Then on 19 February, she died of a pulmonary embolism. The personal declaration, "without any consent," functions gesturally to exorcise a personal pain and also, in the poem's context of an old man haunted by memory, to highlight the difficulty of controlling reality, even when it is made by oneself.

Michaux's language reflects this paradox through syntactic violence, contorting traditional syntax and idioms to suit the creator of these strange worlds, but the language itself resists the author's will, betraying, through the mixed levels of diction and gestural syntax, reality's power over its creator. At times this language obscures the literal situation, preferring an oblique gesture over concrete image making: "You don't offer a chair to someone in bed." These gestures often involve shifts in power, situations where the speaker relates to powers greater than the self: "two long occupations by an armed people who believe in beating down bowling pins" ("The Sack Session"). Comparing the German armies of World Wars I and II indirectly to bowling balls destabilizes the seriousness of the image by equating a military occupation with mundane problems. Through gestures like this, Michaux ironizes the loss of power and the effects of historical trauma, yet, at the same time, the tone underscores the terrible impact of that trauma on the individual.

Translating this personal language, I originally endeavored to maintain the quirks of the original. A hard sell at best. An awkward translation suggests the failures of the translator even as it might represent the original, so in reworking Michaux into more standard English, I've committed my own violence on Michaux's syntax. My goal in this approach has been to maintain the suggestive power of his gestures and figurations over the idiosyncrasy of his grammar. While I have taken a few liberties with this approach, my hope is that it makes clear the complexity of his vision. In the process of working through Michaux's linguistic challenges, I have relied on David Ball's excellent *Darkness Moves: An Henri Michaux Anthology, 1927–1984*, and on Elizabeth Jackson's translation of *Meidosems*. In a few cases, I felt that one or the other had found

the definitive rendering of a line or phrase and I chose not to twist the original for the sake of being different. I am grateful for their work. This translation also benefited from the generous assistance of Marilyn Kallet, Pauline Beauruel, and Marc Lowenthal. Any felicity here belongs to them; the faults are mine alone.

Some of these translations appeared in different form (and in some instances, a slightly different title) in the following publications, to which the translator is grateful:

"The Sea of Breasts," "The Statue and I," "Advice to Young Couples," "Man-Bomb," and "Philosophy through Murder," in *The Dirty Goat*, issue 25 (September 2011).
"In Plaster" in ***Mixitini Matrix*** (fall 2011).

NOTES

1. Richard Ellmann, "Introduction," in Henri Michaux, *Selected Writings*, trans. Richard Ellmann (New York: New Directions, 1968), p. viii.

2. Armand Hoog, "Henri Michaux, or Mythic Symbolism," *Yale French Studies* 9 (1952): 143.

3. Michaux, *Selected Writings*, p. 135.

LIFE IN THE FOLDS

FREEDOM OF ACTION

I spit on my life. I want nothing to do with it.
Who does no better than his life?

It began when I was a child. There was a big cumbersome adult.

How to get revenge on him? I put him in a sack. There I could beat him at my leisure. He cried out but I didn't listen. He wasn't interesting.

I sensibly kept this childhood habit. I don't trust the possibilities for intervention one learns as an adult, and besides, they don't work very well.

You don't offer a chair to someone in bed.

This habit, I say, I've kept it and until today kept it a secret. It was safer.

Its disadvantage—for there is one—is that because of it, I have too much tolerance for impossible people.

I know that I'm waiting for them with the sack. It's something that teaches extraordinary patience.

I allow ridiculous situations to drag on and I dawdle about my life-blockers.

The joy I would feel in throwing them out the door *in reality* is withheld at the moment of action by the incomparably greater delights of soon putting them into the sack. Into the sack where I beat them with impunity

and with an enthusiasm to surpass ten robust men methodically taking turns.

Without this little art of mine, how would I have spent my depressing life, often poor, always under the elbows of others?

How would I have been able to carry on for decades through so many tribulations, under so many masters, near or far, through two wars, two long occupations by an armed people who believe in knocking down bowling pins, against other innumerable enemies?

But this liberating habit saved me. Barely, it's true, and I resisted the despair that seemed bound to leave me nothing. The nonentities, the bores, a brute I could have freed myself from a hundred times over: I set them aside for the sack session.

I haven't done much harm to anyone in life. I've only desired to. Soon I no longer desired to. I had satisfied my desire.

We never achieve what we want in life. If by some happy murder you do away with your five enemies, they'll still make problems for you. And that takes the cake, coming from dead men whose death we had taken such trouble over. There is always something less than perfect in the execution, whereas my way, I can kill them two times, twenty times, and more. Every time the same man delivers me his hateful mug, I smash it into his shoulders until death ensues, and with this death accomplished and the man already cold, if a detail still bothers me, I pick him back up without further ado and murder him again with the appropriate alterations.

That's why in reality, as we say, I do no harm to anyone; not even my enemies.

I keep them for my show where, with the requisite care and disinterest (without which it isn't art), and with the proper touch-ups and rehearsals, I finish them off.

So very few people have anything to complain about me, unless they've rudely gotten in my way. And yet . . .

My heart periodically emptied of its spite opens up to goodness, and you could almost trust me with a little girl for a few hours. Probably nothing unfortunate would happen to her. Who knows? She might even be reluctant to leave me . . .

I adore kneading.

I grab a marshal and grind him up so well he loses half his senses, he loses his nose that he believed had such a good sense of smell, as well as his hand which he can no longer bring up to his kepi, even if an entire army corps were to salute him.

Yes, by means of repeated grinding, I reduce him, I reduce him, a sausage henceforth incapable of intervention.

And marshals alone don't satisfy me. I have in my cellar numerous sausages who were once considerable personages, and apparently out of my reach.

But my infallible instinct for jubilation triumphed over such difficulties.

If they still make some noise afterward, it's really not my fault. Kneading them any further would not have been possible. I've been assured that some still move about. The papers say so. Is it true? How could it be? They're rolled up. What remains is the tail end of phenomena such as we encounter in nature, a kind of mystery in the order of reflections and exhalations, and

whose importance needn't be exaggerated. No, not in the least.

In my cellar, they lie there, in profound silence.

I also have my man-sling. You can shoot men with it far, really far. You have to know how to load them.

Yet it's difficult to shoot them far enough. Quite frankly, they never get shot far enough. Sometimes they come back forty years later, as you're thinking you can at last feel at ease, when they're the ones at ease, returning with the even step of someone in no hurry, someone who could have been there five minutes ago and was to return right after.

For some, the slingshot, for others, the skewer . . . and it's so natural. Difficult to keep your seat. The guests eat. Room needs to be made. New arrivals. Where to put the earlier guests? Where to put them? You put them on the skewer.

Pushed from chair to chair, from place to place, they find themselves before the chimney where you push them and bop! Onto the skewer!

There's nothing unnatural in that. Nothing against the natural order.

That's why no one resists. Snapped up gently, but snapped up irresistibly, they slide toward the hot opening. The idea of resistance really doesn't occur to them. They let it happen, stunned by the obvious.

Instead of eliminating every kid in the area, it would be more peaceful to let thunder reign over the apartment, or over the room where their shouting is shredding peace.

A great force of noisy will is necessary (large orchestras can put you on the right track). As soon as it begins, it continues on its own, and can last for a long time, and not a single shout will filter through the sonorous barrage. It's better not to employ a brass band: even imaginary brass will cause a headache. In which case, why go through the trouble?

With thunder, provided it's easy enough to handle, you should be able to put up with a good hour and a half of some brats playing and shouting. More than that gets difficult.

It'd be better to move.

Anyway, one should always avoid schools. Even after twenty years, they can still stir up memories.

THE SLAPPING GUN

It was among family, as should be expected, that I produced the slapping gun. I produced it without having planned to. My anger suddenly projected from my hand like a glove of wind, like two, three, four, ten gloves, an emanation of gloves that spasmodically, and with terrible speed, shot from my fingertips, flying to the goal, to the hateful head, which they reached without delay.

This repeated discharge from my hand was remarkable. It wasn't just a slap or two. I'm naturally reserved and only let myself go for the precipice of rage.

A veritable ejaculation of slaps, a cascading, jolting ejaculation, my hand remaining rigorously immobile.

That day, I touched magic.

A sensitive man would have been able to see something. Some sort of electric shadow spurting spasmodically from the end of my hand, reassembling and reshaping itself in *an instant*.

To be completely frank, the cousin who had mocked me went to open the door to leave, when, brusquely realizing the shame of the offense, I responded *after the event* with a volley of slaps that, truly, *escaped* from my hand.

I had invented the slapping gun, so to speak; there's no better way to put it.

After that I could no longer see that pretentious cousin without slaps like wasps flying from my hand at her.

This discovery was well worth having to suffer her hateful remarks. It's why I sometimes recommend tolerance for one's immediate family.

I don't travel anymore. Why would travel interest me?

It doesn't. It never does.

I can arrange their country myself.

There is always too much about the way they do things that just doesn't work.

They didn't need to go to such lengths, these New Yorkers with their skyscrapers so easy to fly over, these Chinese with their pagodas and their ancient civilization. I put China in my courtyard. It's more comfortable to observe it there. And they don't try to fool me like they do in their own country, with their xenophobic propaganda. They carry out their retail trading tranquilly at my house. Money flows, and flows. That's all they need, as long as it flows. And they find a way to raise their large family . . . if I give them enough time. Even without money they find a way, and maybe have an even larger family, aided by misery and a resignation to destiny. Even so, I still need to take care.

Neither would I go to Tyrol or to Switzerland, to risk a railway and airline strike on the way back and find myself trapped like a cockroach under a boot.

I'm not that crazy!

I'd put the mountains where and when I like, where chance and some secret whim made me passionate for mountains, in a capital crammed with houses, cars, and pedestrians prepared exclusively for horizontal walking and the fresh air of the plains.

I'd put them there (not elsewhere), among the brick construction and rubble work, and the buildings have only to make room.

Moreover, they're volcanoes, my mountains are, ready to spit up a new height in no time. They rise up between the blocks of dreadful houses, jostling them to take their place, the place they deserve. They're there now.

Otherwise, would I continue to live in this opaque city? Would anyone continue to live here?

No.

Without this volcanic invasion, life in a large city would soon be utterly unbearable.

As soon as we forget what men are, we leave everything to their goodwill. That's probably why it's good to reflect every now and then, to retreat.

He who has no women thinks only of caressing them. He who a woman has, caresses her, but thinks only of beating her. Well, let him beat her then . . . as long as she doesn't notice.

Better still would be to kill her. Afterward, it's much better. You'll feel more composed, as if you had just smoked a good pipe, a really good pipe. She too, for that matter, she'll also appreciate you more, find you less preoccupied, more lively, more lovable, because you will be, *it's inevitable*. But you may need to kill her again from time to time. That's the price one pays for peace in a household.

Now you know. You can no longer hold back . . .

Besides, she's been killing you, maybe since your first day together. For a woman, one who's a little delicate, a little nervous, it's almost a necessity.

Let he who has killed fewer than one hundred times cast the first stone.

Man cannot do without philosophy. An adult without philosophy is grotesque. One must know how to find one's way to it. Courage and perspicacity.

But I'm not going to talk about it here specifically. I talk about it everywhere, to those who understand.

I will speak of the mob.

I cannot, when I consider the various impossibilities that keep me from forging ahead, I cannot encounter people in the street at that moment.

You encounter all too many people, everywhere, who make you lose faith, who get in your way, who slow you down, who stop you, who make you deny yourself.

Fortunately, there are moments of impetuous certitude where all these bustling people find themselves "on the wrong side," on the side that gives way, whereas yours is firm, marvelously firm.

So you take to the street and scythe your way through the idiot crowd. The die is cast. Innocent? Who's innocent? Show them to us if they exist!

Anyway, they don't suffer much harm for getting mowed down, this insensitive crowd, whereas you, on

the other hand, you feel all the better for it. Try it. Anyone can take to the streets in this manner. It's a question of confidence. After that, relieved of the gesture you had to make, you can, your mind finally at ease, attain philosophy. You have achieved perfect horizontality. Take advantage of it. Even without forcing it, you could be benevolent. It's also pleasant, yes, at least at the outset . . .

IN PLASTER

Loudmouth who no longer mouths off, the sergeant, I'd stick him in plaster. Mouth that returned to the cemetery of mouthy-mouths I left behind me, in the cemetery of plaster where they're "taken" in mid-insult, the women in mid-scene, the parents in mid-curse, the pawns and the race of agents of discipline in mid-reprimand.

When, as a child, I saw plaster setting for the first time, it was a shock and I began to think. I was unable to turn away from the spectacle. It was still just a spectacle, but I vaguely felt, by the way I was utterly gripped by it, that there was something there, something I too would be using one day.

I have immobilized restless hinderers in it, men thirsty for command, some local Casanovas from an assembly or party or even a salon—the latter of which calls for more plaster than a mountain doctor ever ordered at the height of ski season, when presumptuous fools start changing style mid-descent, in the brilliant weight-bearing snow (which will bear them in any case, even with both legs broken).

. . . Let's not speak of breaking, but of immobilization. Peace. Marvelous, deep, steady. Without desire.

Yes, I shall know this. There's no man, not even one of a lethargic disposition, who can say as much. Even me, I wouldn't have gotten such a result without plaster.

LIKE THE SEA

It often happens that I hurl myself forward like the sea onto the beach. But I still don't know what to do. I hurl myself forward, I come back, I hurl myself forward again.

My growing momentum will soon take on form. It must. The extent of my movement makes me pant (not with my lungs, but through a uniquely psychic breathing).

Will it be a murder? Will it be a merciful wave over the World? We still don't know. But it's imminent.

I await, oppressed, the breaking of a preparatory wave.

Here it is, the moment's come . . .

It was the wave of joy that time, the spread of benevolence.

It's nothing, wringing a neck, wringing ten of them, pulling a whining spinster up from the floor along with the seat she's in, doing it so suddenly that she cracks her skull against a piece of furniture as the armchair loses a leg. For this, the slightest bit of anger suffices, provided it's real, but to grab a mountain before you in the Alps, to dare to grab it with force and shake it, even just for an instant, that grandiose nuisance that's been facing you for a month. Now that's something that offers the true measure—or immeasure, rather—of a man.

But for this you need an anger-anger. One that doesn't leave a single cell free (even a tiny distraction is categorically impossible), an anger that can no longer, that would no longer be able to subside (and they almost all subside, whatever they may say, when the bite's excessively large).

It will happen to me sooner or later, though. Oh, when it does, I won't have had any grievances against this mountain, apart from its perpetual presence, which has obsessed me for two months. But I took advantage of the immense power placed at my disposal by an anger

stemming from a spear aimed at my pride. My anger in its full flowering, in its climax, encountered this big nuisance of a mountain which aroused my fury, immensifying it, and threw me, beside myself, impassive, onto the mountain as if onto a mass that really could tremble.

Did it tremble? In any case, I seized it.

An almost unthinkable attack, dispassionate.

That's the peak of my offensive up to now.

No, it's true, I'm not a successful man. Why would I be? Since I succeed anyway.

The goal I don't achieve is the goal that benefits me, that I benefit.

Why would I go to the head of a large army to besiege brazenly the capital of a foreign country? I'd be annoyed at having taken such trouble over so minor an act of insolence, to have earned in twenty years a few stripes you can get for a hundred bucks and ten cents of inventive thought, to have *really* sacrificed a load of men who won't be coming back to life (and who aren't at all amused by this, nor is the commander).

Honestly, I'd be ashamed to be in his place, or at least to be pleased by it. Even if I were only obliged to suffer twenty minutes and not twenty years of being a slave to discipline.

To put up with so many rules, just to wound some poor wretches we can't even finish off properly or bring back to their initial state of health. No really, I don't understand that vicious wastrel.

Fortunately, we'll never meet.

He who was made to be an only son but has seven brothers, here's what he must do:

No, on second thought, I have no advice. If he has read me, he already knows, he's familiar with the sculptural life. The real sculptural life. Seven brothers! What serendipity to always have so many enemies within reach!

But perhaps I haven't said enough about the sculptural life. You should know that as a sculptor, I don't have the reputation I deserve. It has nothing to do with the disgusted remarks I may have made regarding other sculptors whose works strike me as . . . but let's not try to describe them . . . because they don't strike me. They work, there's no denying that, but their sculptures still don't strike me.

These poor people work with unrewarding material, unrewarding and terribly slow to take form.

Whereas I work with living bodies, at once and on the spot. Soft material that inspires, that fascinates; the real concern is that it not swallow you up.

ADVICE AND RESPONSE TO SOME REQUESTS FOR ADVICE

"Should I pin up the babies?" writes J.O. No, I'm not going to respond to this insidious question. I no longer feel safe, and were it just about a butterfly, I still wouldn't respond, even if it were flying in a singularly irritating manner, that "Here I come, here I don't" sort, and displayed on its wing a gaudy, overly conventional decorative art, no, you won't expose me on that either.

As for the babies, they are the honor of the nation. Its future honor. And if they scream, that's natural enough. Screams like the waves of the sea, with highs and lows: it's because they have to catch their breath, enraged as they are, and let you know, pointedly, that they're suffering. Screams like a call to light: it's because they hope to manage once and for all to express themselves and drain away their suffering.

These bad artists create. Alas, you assist in their creation. It's grotesque. Too early to convince them of their unpleasant failure. In a few years, when these failures have finally calmed down, they'll give up self-expression to take up mechanical engineering or agriculture. But it's unfortunate that they persist for now.

J.O. writes me again: "I'm coating them in flour. Is that okay? I'm throwing them into an enormous sand dune. Consequently, no more screaming, not a sigh, and the day ends as if in church. Is that okay?"

No, I'm not going to answer this man. I think the war must have gotten him worked up.

I forgive him, but he needs to be careful.

Others probably won't be as understanding as I am.

When we pass by Les Halles, we fill it with feces. It's difficult to do otherwise. Very difficult.

The smell it then gives off (those hundreds of tons of feces) is capable with great difficulty of dominating the empire itself with the stench, the continual foul stench of this mass in sheds, composed of cabbage and other vegetables, that is to say, the part of the vegetable kingdom most inclined to rot ignominiously, the part man prefers, and also composed of sadly bland meat.

Some noseless Herculeses circulate within this squalid prison. They must be spared. They're not responsible. They would use up their strength, however great it may be, against this law of nature that produces a stench from what man loves to eat.

"While they're sent off to be executed, I perform on the trapeze. Why? I don't know. A swinging exuberance, an excitement, in short, the joy makes it so that I can barely endure my heart in my chest, its caress like a new touch, as it beats deeply, as planned, keeping me alert and breathless under its threat.

"And I turn and turn tirelessly around the bar, making, to whatever extent I can given my limited means, the star that orbits imperturbably in the night of the centuries."

No, I've no factory, no tools. I'm one of those rare man-bombs. I say rare because if there are others why haven't they made themselves known? True, there may well have been others. We have to exercise some caution.

"Exploding could get dangerous some day," thinks the public.

After killing, caresses. "So he says," thinks the public, "but if he remains in the slaughter, if he sinks into the slaughter, if it moves him finally to slaughter," and the public, always the judge in its simple soul, is ready to condemn us.

But it's time for me to stop talking. I've said too much.

Writing obviously leaves us much too exposed.

One word more and I'd tumble into truth.

Anyway, I've stopped slaughtering. Tired of it. One more period of my life that's over. Now, I'm going to paint, they're beautiful, colors, when they come out of the tube, and sometimes, even for a while after. It's like blood.

APPARITIONS

The habit that binds me to my limbs is suddenly no more. Space extends (that of my body?). It is round. I fall into it. I fall down. I fall up. I fall, minuscule, in multiple directions. Quick, I dash. Here, there, in successive depths. Blows. I suffer blows, extremely brief. Coming from a distance, from a great distance, from everywhere.

Impossible to escape. I'm in the constellation of pinpricks.

It appears during the day, the whitest of days. Bird.

It flaps its wings, it flies off. It flaps its wings, it fades.

It flaps its wings, it reappears.

It lands. And then is no more. With a fluttering it faded into the white space.

Such is my pet bird, the bird that comes to inhabit the sky of my small courtyard. Inhabit? You see how . . .

But I remain there, gazing at it, fascinated by its apparition, fascinated by its disappearance.

At that time, the fear I hadn't known in ten years, that fear took hold of me again. A dull pain at first, but one that, when it finally comes, comes like lightning, like the blast that destroys buildings, fear took me over.

My fear musing over my hand, which was bound to freeze in the near future, this future just that moment took place; and my hand froze, no longer able to hold an object. My fear thinking of the necrosis of my extremities, my feet promptly froze and, the life draining out of them, felt as if cut off from my body. After that, a categorical dam kept me at a distance. I had already abandoned these clods that soon could no longer be called my feet, assuring me of terrible pain before they left, and after, once they were gone . . .

As my fear then went to my head, in no time at all, a shooting pain slashed my skull and was followed by such a feeling of faintness that even the effort to remember my name would have been daunting.

So I circulated through my panic-stricken body in anguish, provoking shocks, arrests, groans. I woke my kidneys and they hurt. I woke my colon, it pinched; my

heart, it unsheathed. I would undress at night and, trembling, inspect my skin, waiting for the pain that was going to pierce it.

A cold tickle would alert me, sometimes here, sometimes there, a cold tickle throughout all of my zones.

The war had just ended and I had stopped shielding myself, when fear, which had been waiting just for some relief to appear, fear entered me in a gale and from there on, *my* war began.

Thermocautery has something definite about it, something irrefutable. Its style is simple: "I see you, I destroy you."

What an admirable furrow it shall trace in the indefensible flesh it will encounter! Straight-out sculpture, and this sculpture is chiseling. With passion you throw yourself into your work. Nothing more troubling than the smell of something burning. But no matter! The nose isn't what's at play here. Who has a creative nose? Not me. So it's not on that account that you'd refuse this admirable instrument to anyone wanting to scour the human body in an interesting manner. But careful, hold it tight, aim it at the sought-after body. If it's exciting in the "I-you," it's terrible in the "You-me," or even in the "I-me," if you're weak enough to let yourself be accosted, which can happen. Oh, how easily it happens! Watch out! It's done! Let go! Let go, I say! Too late, there it is, attaching itself to your flesh, entering your thigh, where you don't find much, though, there it is burning your very own knee, and the terrible heat of the infinitely small blast furnace enters your bone, running through it

in an instant, jumping up to the top like a panic-stricken rat.

Broken puppet, you toss and turn now, you toss and turn in the bed of misfortune, you reckless idiot.

THE ASSAULT OF THE SWAYING SABER

There, I suffered the assault of the swaying saber. Difficult to parry its blows. And with what grace it enters the flesh.

There is also the lance raised against me, long, very long.

It tapers; if it didn't, given that it's over eight meters long, I don't think it could be wielded even by six men together. Already at a meter from me, it is as pointed as a hypodermic needle and it keeps tapering to such an extent that at fifty centimeters it's already almost invisible. Thus, when it enters the body, fine as it is, but all the more penetrating for being so, it barely disturbs the nicely assembled cell layers of the different tissues. So you must not move, not in the slightest (but how not to?), and almost not even breathe. Then perhaps it will withdraw the way it entered, gently.

But woe to anyone who jumps in alarm. A dazzling pain then strikes your depths. A neuron, no doubt, a neuron spits out its electric suffering, a very memorable suffering.

Oh! Moments! Such moments of alarm in this life of ours . . .

But sometimes, when it has gently entered you, motionless, while behind your back people thoughtlessly move about, you sometimes have the strange impression that maybe in this moment of rest of yours, it's busy killing someone through your body, I mean "beyond," and you await the fatal scream, but without wishing for it, naturally. You're in enough of a predicament as it is.

THE DISEMBOWELING APPARATUS

There are times when I can't go to bed without being operated on. As soon as I close my eyes, the bed, with an urgent movement, rises up into the air and I end up not far from the ceiling.

Then the operating apparatus descends on me. Milling machines are driven into a solid frame.

Under the apparatus, capable of ripping out steel chips from a solid bar without any effort, leaving a smooth, deep hole in it, I brace myself desperately. No, more like one who would still hope. I brace myself, I brace myself, I brace myself so tensely that, abandoning my weak nature for a sort of hard, vibrating apron run through by galvanizing currents, it takes nothing for these well-tested metallic machines to pierce my energetically taut surface.

Until then, until this piercing occurs, I maintain, even though the situation would demoralize a robot, I maintain an unmitigated fearlessness.

But then! Then . . . when this disemboweling apparatus (for how can one believe in an operation for which it's obviously not equipped, at least not if it is to do so

with any success?), when this disemboweling apparatus has made my surface jump, even a little, from the layer of the dermis in its thinnest spot, then, then my nature, which the slightest thing, a crushed fingernail, defeats, my wretched nature . . . but what nature could resist that dreadful penetration? That's something I'd like to know.

THE DANGER IN THE ASSOCIATIONS OF THOUGHTS

It's beautiful, a saw, a pit sawyer's saw, a saw that powerfully, smoothly, calmly moves through a heavy sawlog, cutting it up completely.

A pair of lungs is also beautiful. Very beautiful. Within, without. Within even more, so magnificently useful when you know how to use them, taking them every now and then into the cold air of high altitudes where they thrive and take delight.

But how miserable it is, a pair of lungs under a saw that approaches, imperturbably, how miserable it is, especially when these lungs are yours, and why did you start thinking of the saw when your body alone is what interests you, to which the saw, for this reason, will inevitably draw near? And in a time of blood such as ours, how could it not cling to it? And there it is, entering as if it were at home, sinking in thanks to its magnificent teeth, calmly cutting its furrow into the lungs that will be of use to no one, no one, isn't that obvious?

Too late now for "absent-minded" thoughts. Here it is. It reigns over everything and like a crazy person, there it is, cutting into your lost body, now inevitably lost.

THE OVERBURDENED HORSE

Often when I am alone an hour or two, a horse appears before me, at a distance, moving still further away. The road is deserted and he must have passed me some time ago, but whatever I do, however hard I try to push through the "dark," knowing it's there, I never manage to do so quickly enough before it's already gained an eight-hundred-meter lead, no, distance, a now reduced mass, advancing only to be further reduced and almost disappear.

Large, very large, with powerful forms that suggest labor more than traveling in stages, tall and loaded like a dromedary, it moves away, lone monument to life in the desert surrounding it, but this monument gives confidence. It possesses confidence. Extremely tall on its legs, which are all one can see clearly in a cluster of indistinct things, a kind of packsaddle and a very small head that seems chubby and fairly mobile, unless it's a saucepan, or even a helmet, because the head guiding it can't be visible at this distance in the heap of baggage overloading it excessively, from what I can see.

This horse, I notice, never turns back to me, nor to anything (isn't there a horsefly that stings him?), nor to any noise behind it. There seems to be neither noise nor life. It advances accompanied by its lone burden.

In the past—need it be said?—it wouldn't have been the kind of horse that would have appeared to me.

Suddenly, at night, like an abrupt kick to the chest, to the heart, but it's not the kind of kick that gives, it's the one that withdraws, that withdraws, leaving you on the verge of fainting, on the verge of subjectless horror, on the verge of "nothing more."

The knees, in an instant, in a tenth of an instant, begin trembling, as if under a fever of 110 degrees.

But not from fever (you wouldn't mind that, a sort of companionship), not from fever. Nothing. And "nothing" then makes way for the terrible event to come, I wait for it, that which calls in the silence, that which is not going to be put off indefinitely . . .

THE SEA OF BREASTS

I'm quite sure, Aniado tells me, that I'm not the only one. There must be others who have bathed in the sea of breasts.

It never takes me long to find them under me, like grass adrift. Probably more than a few breaststrokes; you should never fear going the distance. Contemplative, I advance, unworried about the return.

That's why I prefer the waters of a large river, near its mouth, similar to a lake, but with a slow current. I drift down the softly curving river. Oh, delightful! You never want to leave the surprise of the exquisite little islands.

Are we already in the gulf, or still at the mouth? You don't know, you don't want to know. You swim, you keep swimming until you're exhausted and wash up, barely conscious, on the shore, half in the sand, half in the water, as wavelets come and go around you and invade you, gurgling, and whether the mass of water breathes in the distance, softly, softly like voices vaguely heard, vaguely evoked, you don't know.

THE STATUE AND I

In my spare time, I've been teaching a statue to walk. Given its exaggeratedly prolonged immobility, it isn't easy. Not for the statue. Nor for me. Great distance separates us, I realize that. I'm not so stupid that I don't realize that.

But one can't hold all the good cards. And so, forward.

What matters is that its first step be a good one. Everything depends on that first step. I know this. I know this all too well. Hence my anxiety. Consequently, I practice. I practice as never before.

Standing next to the statue in a scrupulously parallel manner, our feet both raised and stiff like stakes planted in the ground.

Alas, we're never exactly alike. Be it our feet, their arch, or our bearing, or our style, there's always something missing, and the eagerly awaited departure can't take place.

That's why I'm almost unable to walk anymore myself, seized by a rigidity, though one that's all momentum,

and my captivated body frightens me and no longer takes me anywhere.

ON THE DIFFICULTY OF GOING BACK

It was evening. It was very dark, though it was only five o'clock. I was in mortal anguish, anguish, also exhaustion, but mortal anguish above all. Laid out, without moving, I asked myself whether the accident had really happened, if my legs had indeed been broken, or if it was solely within myself (if only it could just be that!), a spectacle that had entered into the peregrinations and evocations of my mind so vividly that I dared not verify it, I stayed quietly on the hotel room's red couch sensing the tragedy, without moving an inch of skin, afraid of verifying that which, from that too cursory inspection, would become irrevocable, irrevocably my misfortune, no doubt, and I had wanted to toss that day out of my life. But there it was, approaching its end, true, but already a very full day, filled by that enormous and stupid truck that had suddenly swept over me like a dark beacon, and I wondered whether its enormous wheels had really passed over me . . . or whether . . . but I preferred, be it just for another half-hour, to leave myself an open door, to leave some possibility to my legs, already heavy, like boundary stones. I saw all too clearly that I would

never stand again, affected as I was by my twelve grams of albumin, two years with no improvement, getting infections from the slightest thing, from the prick of a wild rose, and though unable to endure an operation because of my heart, one would still be necessary, which naturally wouldn't be a success, they would have to rebreak my legs three months later and naturally I wouldn't have the strength for it . . . Drenched in cold sweat, I couldn't bring myself to remove the coverlet from my legs where the lead was weighing down and tried instead, making an effort at a bit of calm, to go back into the accident and to what had immediately preceded it (be it reality or evocation) and in the latter case take another road than the one from which the noisy and stupid five tons had emerged.

And as I was there, seeking the way in my memory, I was thrown into another concern, an excellent sign, and one I could immediately appreciate as such. So, relieved of the greater part of my anxiety, I raised the covers from my legs, which appeared to be untouched and quite capable of supporting me whenever I wanted to leave that bed of prey which had bogged me down in myself for having wanted to withdraw from the company of others.

. . . I had been transported without transition to the demolition workshop. Alive. Numb. They immediately set about extracting the tendons from my limbs so as to send them to the depot's sorting room.

And already they're tenderizing my back with little blows of a mallet, numbing me even more. "He's still not tender enough," announces a voice, and the hammering resumes, intensified.

Already they're driving in awls of some sort, on which they tap.

The fitting, the search for spots is scrupulous. "The whole thing needs to come like a wick," says the voice that had already spoken. This time I'm going to talk to them. I have some sudden strength. In vain!

I find nothing to say to them. Precisely nothing. Under the continuing blows, I sink into a paralysis of goodbye.

When your foot is at the end of a long hangar, what a struggle it is to bring it back! An endless struggle!

Too late now to wonder how it managed, constantly stretching through the space cluttered with tools, to extend all the way over there, almost thirty meters from your troubled chest, from your head panicking under a suddenly increased responsibility, calculating the negative consequences, what can be repaired and what is beyond repair . . .

Quick, you have to bring them back, if it's still possible, before the place opens (but, as it happens, the bell just rang), before the workers return, unhappy, brutally opening the door, stumbling over them, dropping their heavy tools on them as they curse, and that's a fracture guaranteed. From such a distance, a bone, you think, it'll withstand it, it's a mess. It's no longer a fracture, it's ten fractures and more. They're irritated by this obstacle running from one end of the workshop to the other, they're irritated, and you would be too if you weren't at the other end of this miserable business.

Oh, these traps of nature, that free us only to soon find us again . . .

THE TREPANNED PATIENT

The tranquility we have in life (for we do have it, and sometimes for such a long time that we almost wish for misfortune, so great is our boredom), the tranquility we have in life rests on a confidence, which rests on confidences, which in short rest on our head, which given our limited experience we believe to be solid.

But one day, when a house beam falls, as the ceiling collapses, bombarding you with a supplement of otherwise useless blows, your skull shows itself for what it is, an object, and as far as objects go, a fragile object at that. It's the first thing to strike any witnesses. For you, that'll happen later, and that's another thing altogether. At that moment you're speechless. And once a man is truly speechless, he has to wait for others to be less so. They're busy, all too busy with you. As they say, "they intervene." But intervention or not, the one with the skull fracture . . . well, he'll find out later.

When, three days later, skull encased in bandages, he uncertainly lifts a weary eyelid, the doctors and assistants congratulate themselves. Not him: he doesn't congratulate himself. He doesn't congratulate anyone.

There's a place in his body where he prefers to live. It's not the same place for everyone. That's natural. But it's natural for many to like to sit inside their head. They circulate, of course, climb down, go from organ to organ, from here to there, but they often like to return to their head.

That's what the trepanned patient immediately tries to do, but a second after this immediately, he knows, he feels, he is assured that he'll never be able to climb back into his head, at least not so as to truly inhabit it.

There's a place above all where he'd like to go in his head, a place he knows well, he alone, from where he used to see others and their little concerns and from where he knew how to rein them in when necessary, very gently, without too much trouble, a place now lost in this great emptiness that moves . . . and hurts.

A war comes. A war passes. Before passing it consumes a lot. It consumes enormously. So it's natural that it crushes some skulls here or there. That's what the trepanned patient tells himself. He doesn't want pity. He just wants to reenter his head.

Be it day or night, he is a trepanned patient. Although the dimmest light from the softest lamp now causes him pain (for everything is brutal that enters the head once something really brutal has already entered it), he prefers it, perhaps, to the dark in which he thinks about it. But it's not a real preference.

That's not what he's trying for, he's trying, he's just trying, he tries relentlessly, he's just trying to reenter his head.

Night is a great cubic space. Resistant. Extremely resistant. Crowding walls, and from every direction, restricting you, which try to restrict you. Which shouldn't be accepted.

Personally, I don't extricate myself. And yet I've already overcome so many obstacles.

I've knocked down so many walls. But more remain. Oh, for all that, more remain! At the moment, I'm waging war against ceilings in particular.

The hard vaults that form over me, because they appear, I hammer at them, I pound them, I make them jump, shatter, burst, and there are always others behind them. With my enormous, tireless hammer, I deal them blows that could fell a mammoth, if one were still to be found . . . and there. But there are only vaults, stubborn vaults, which have to be broken and battered down. Then it's a question of clearing that conquered place of the debris that masks what comes from beyond, which I foresee all too well, for that matter, because it's obvious to me that there's still another vault further on, higher up, that will also have to be battered down.

What is hard beneath me bothers me just as much, an obstacle I cannot, I must not tolerate, of a material from the same huge hated block in which I've been put to live.

Through the blows of a pickaxe, I rip it up, then I rip up the next one.

I keep descending, from cellar to cellar, crushing vaults, tearing up supports.

I descend, imperturbable, unwearied by the discovery of cellars without end, so many that I stopped counting them long ago, I dig, I keep digging until, this endless job done, I'm obliged to climb back up to take account of the direction I've taken, for you end up digging in a spiral. But once I'm up there, I'm in a hurry to get back down, called by the vast recesses waiting for me to smash them in. I descend, paying no attention to anything, with giant strides, I descend stairs like those of the centuries—and at last, beyond the stairs, I hurl myself into the chasm of my excavations, more quickly, more quickly, more confusedly, until, stumbling on the final obstacle, the momentarily final obstacle, I start shoveling again with newfound fury, I shovel, shovel, digging into the endless mass of walls that keep me from starting off on a good foot.

But one day the situation will be different, perhaps.

Full of me
Full of you.
Full of endless veils of obscure desires.
Full of folds.
Full of night.
Full of unlimited folds, the folds of my lookout.
Full of rain.
Full of shards, of debris, of heaps of debris.
Of cries as well, especially cries.
Full of asphyxia.
Slow torrent.

Haloed
haloed
haloed as if smothered
when a deep darkness is kindled in me.
Liberated
enchained
overwhelmed, attaining the lull
or furious, striking the opponent's brow with a
mallet.
Spread out
gathered up
poured out
anastomosed.

Haloed.

Face that doesn't speak doesn't laugh
that says neither yes nor no.
Monster.
Shadow.
Face that stretches,
that goes,
that flows,
that slowly to us buds . . .
Lost face.

WALKING

Walking,
walking,
merchant of beaten faces and worried birds,
walking in the village ablaze,
merchant of lost wakes,
of phantoms of wind, of water, of odors,
walking a dog's life,
walking,
walking.

Someone mad,
someone shining,
someone a thousand times crossed out,
someone exiled from the depths of the horizon,
someone sulking at the depths of the horizon,
someone crying out from the depths of the horizon,
someone thin,
someone honest,
someone proud,
someone who would like to be,
someone in the churning of two epochs colliding,
someone in the noxious gas of consciousnesses
succumbing,
someone as on the first day,
someone . . .

EYE

Who will tell the weight of glances in life?

Eye,
eye,
eye like Om,
eye the way water runs,
the way waves return,
the way the palm abandons,
the way the absentee departs again,
the way sudden misfortune muffles a world,
which it extends at the same time.

Eye eternity.

STRANGE SITUATIONS

I

I was in the throes of a profound resistance. A pig was cutting up a butcher. I was in the butcher. Impossible to move back. The pig was a world. The butcher was a world, but there was a change and after the change the situation was this:

The plain was vast, the sky was high. I was carried off in a wild balloon. What flights! What falls! What kangaroo leaps into enormous space!

The whole atmosphere swollen with naive aerostats, naive, but spirited, indomitable.

In the basket, thighs, cries, mad hot areas in the cluttered sky, but there was a change and the new situation was this:

Stock cars, stock cars, stock cars.

A long cattle train slowly entered the marshaling yard, while, very reliably, a train coming from the opposite direction tore off all the steers' heads but one, one in each car, which lows for a long time, exhaling with great force the soul of the herd, the herd that, losing its blood, kneels in the cars.

I was going to say something, but there was a change and the situation was this:

Water! Water! Endless water. Plains, sheets of water, pools of flowing water, rivers, streams with flooded banks. But there was a shift and after the shift the view was this:

A city. The gates of a white city one enters by water. It was a great Sunday of decapitations.

We escaped with great difficulty, the white city finally vanished under our steps and I fall into a past era.

In a coach I don a cuirass. So difficult! I take it off. I make it into a saw. But I was embarrassed. I had lost the knack of coordinating my feelings. How to strike a great blow? I surveyed the debris of the cuirass. I could no longer remember whether I had left someone in it. So many absent! So many prodigals returned whom we had believed lost!

But there was a change . . . and I find myself in Africa.

Very well! And well embarrassed! So I buy the right to be a Negro. And now I'm at peace. Then I want to leave the country and revoke the Negro. But they don't want to revoke. A despot, commanding with thunder, constantly throws me back onto tom-tom soil.

I sit a moment. A mule driver, thinking I'm asleep, kills me. Wrong! I stand back up, blind only. O night! Impenetrable night, truly impenetrable this time. And now the wind blows. A terrible wind, a wind from hell.

Within a few seconds, my skull has been shaved by its swift current.

But there is a change: I can see again and a portion of the admirable world again stretches before my amazed eyes. There are stains. Everywhere. An enormous number of stains. The women wear eye masks. You see nothing of the men's faces. A cover lies over the houses, facades and roofs. This gray slipcover makes them all look the same. I enter a dairy. On the ground, puddles with a bland smell, over which a sea of butterflies flutter wildly. They come at me, throwing themselves upon me. I grab a rifle, aim at one between its magnificent, compound eyes and fire. It's a man that falls. A real tragedy if he has a family! The butterflies, as if frantic, hurl themselves at him, at me, in an infernal dance joining killer to killed, while on the floor thin trickles of red blood seep into the pool of milk.

But there's a change and after the change, water has replaced the milk. Again water! It rises. Menacing even the roadway of the bridge I've hoisted myself onto. So I tear off the parapet and solemnly formulate a grand decree of peace.

Futile decision! At this very moment I sense that I'm losing my son in a shipwreck.

II

I had but a pant leg of a soul and it hung loosely.

Melancholy held me in its folds, with no faith in melancholy. I would have preferred to have a woman of the people by me.

Now grandeur and space: spectral ensemble.

We saw rolling toward us, banks of a battle waged in the distance, we saw rolling toward us, from the distant field of devastation, between the debris of engines, the carcasses of animals, the cadavers of men.

Sometimes an injection through their clothes reactivated them a bit. They raised themselves on their elbows as if to read, but the effort finished them off and they fell back, face down forever.

A dying man, raising himself on his elbows, said: "I'm not suffering too much," and died.

The water rose. I swam, a dreamer among the wretched, passing near destroyed towlines, gathering, without meaning to, dogs, beggars, women heavy with weariness and motherhood.

But there was a change and I was no longer with myself. Yet I was embarrassed. I had a hundred heads. They preceded me like a baton pointing out the direction. But no baton and one head was already too many for me. I had a rotten head. I no longer had a head. I had cut it off to strengthen my balance. I looked into the depths of a well to see whether it had fallen there. No well, no head, but so much water! And storm. Frightening storm. There remained several thousand-franc rafts. It's hard sometimes to make up your mind! Especially when you have only a few coins, but there was a change and I fell into the mud. And what mud! You had to constantly drag yourself through it. The whole country was like that. Entire cities toppled, swallowed up by holes of mud. The men were all fish, or nearly so, or at least foreigners. Everyone was a foreigner. The country belonged to no one. Someone was working the earth. Looking more closely, it was a man shoving his wife into the clay of an embankment with great kicks of his leg. The embankment closed quietly over her.

But there was a change and this change revealed this: battles, battles. An extraordinary frenzy of battles.

This intensity which had been thought extreme soon grew even more extreme, to a point even more furious.

These fanatics could no longer retreat. They gave the impression that their quarrel would have to be emptied into a volcano.

But at the height of the action, there was a change and now a dark sky is exposed. An astonishingly dark sky. A violent wind had just dropped off. The backs of beings could be seen. There was a sort of loosening of resolutions.

We took several steps and arrived at the sea.

A priest was performing the Divine Office in a cask, in a large cask. His clothing was severe, but his manners displayed the greatest carelessness one ever saw at mass.

Sometimes he splashed about in the turbulent liquid, sometimes he staggered in the rolling cask.

Never had a man, even one dead drunk, ever appeared less coordinated to me in his movements. But once the *Ite, missa est* was pronounced, there was a change. A small cloud had just appeared in the sky? A slightly larger, dark, and menacing cloud followed it. As it was about to reach the first, there were explosions, vibrations, a general wobbling.

Then some time. Nothing but time. Time flowed, time without any accompaniment.

Then a light wind, the wind that passed over ruins.

It was over.

THE FLAW

It was an epic of giants. We lived there as ants. And so we triumphed. Success through the lower door. But a deterioration in us, after years gone by, growing increasingly worse, presently warned us that the flaw we had to overcome in the giant had now settled in our organs, still strangely small, but calmly growing, to the definitive disorder of our whole being, now given over, in vain, to regret.

THE CONVOY

I was to convoy a considerable troop. What we were transporting, I don't know.

At first I thought someone else was in charge. They only came to me for certain orders, the sort a stranger can give.

The caravan, it sometimes passed through other caravans.

These intersectings were our anxiety, our sadness, our joy, our enrichment, our loss, our surprise, our confusion. Our hopes, as well.

The camels with their buoyant feet accompanied our malaise. Unfortunate distraction, they drove us to think "camel."

My kingdom, this prince tells me, is so inevitably destined to ruin that the time will come, and it isn't far off, when the most desperate beggar wouldn't want to set his foot in it.

Its loss is certain. There are enemies. But it's not from them that I expect it. They don't dare consider it. That saves me, but it doesn't save my kingdom, which, whatever they do, whatever they tolerate, is slowly sinking.

This must have also been noticed by several of our scholars, who have ties to me, and who for that reason don't declare it in public and even say nothing about it whatsoever, wishing to confide this truth to me alone, and I often see them coming to me with expressions much too serious for simple courtly compliments, so I dismiss them, sharply interrupting their speeches with a thank you or a cordial word that dismisses them, and in this manner I send them away, their eyes still charged with a message they were unable to deliver, that pierces their head, their head and their heart, I know this, but I

don't want to relieve them of it. Nor myself, I'm unable to relieve myself of it either.

The entire land of this country must give way and soon be no more, dragging its blind inhabitants along with it.

In this unhappy year, I lost my hands but kept my wrists. It wasn't very satisfactory. I had to make do. Since then, an expanse of calm has settled within me. I have never been so calm. Vast despair pushed back my limits.

Hence my calm, increased by that grandeur. Quite despite myself! And I moved about the immense circus of my unhappiness.

I was very close to losing it, however. It was because someone wanted, through artificial means, to give me some fingers to replace the others and allow me to face up to the necessities of life. I hesitated. In the end I said "no," and regained my peace of mind. This feeling which is so enormous, it has to be peace of mind, otherwise it wouldn't be bearable.

Sometimes I weep, though, I weep, I can't take it anymore, I weep, pierced by incessant blows of a whistle, yells, rather, but so close together they're like blows of a lance and every one of them yelling in me, they yell:

"You've lost your hands! You've lost your hands! You wretch! You've lost your life . . ."

It is the dizzy spells that are my whitewater rivers. It is fatigue that is my swimming among the water lilies. The crow's nest that appears so high up, that's my pain, and the ship that I see would not bleed through its hawse-holes if I wasn't myself losing strength.

Posts with vulture heads. Double posts. Stubborn posts, like standing suicides. To no land, I know, do you announce our approach. I recognize you all too well for what you really are and understand you through my grief.

It was shown to me with some mystery. It was given to me with some regret. It was given to me with some reverence for the "outcome of the coat that cleaves space."

Those were the very words of the donor. Yet when I left, it was with a rag in my hand.

It didn't help me with anything. Yet when I went to throw it away, it appeared to steel itself against my intention. So I kept it, and it seems to me that without ever really being useful to me, it leads me to be taken seriously by the superpowers, who, if I'm not mistaken, go so far as to vaguely envy me for it.

AT THE CITY GATES

I was taken to the city gates through a strange narrowing.

Thousands, thousands of butchers, arms raised, waited for the first baby to come to them.

Coachmen, on carriages (we heard the sounds of wheels on the cobblestones everywhere), coachmen were driving these young children to them.

And they were driving them about! Oh, how they drove them about! Yet not one of them got here.

I suppose it is because there was a fall.

The city was a huge well.

SITUATIONS

Given the situation, there was some excitement. Given my temperament, there was some serenity. How to unite them?

Then the situation changed.

There was coagulation and a call for coagulation.

There again, our incompatibility. My core is hard, I like it to be hard. Yet life follows its inexorable path, short and regulated.

Then there was a situation of tufts (and flowers). This no longer suited me, and still, time passed.

At last these eras passed along with many others that followed, and a situation arose, and in that one there was calm.

But as all tranquility had long since disappeared in me, I who was now hesitant and agitated, I didn't recognize it, or recognized it as an old acquaintance with whom something's not quite right.

And so the situation was as if it had not been and disappeared in turn before I could embrace it.

BETWEEN HEAVEN AND EARTH

When I'm not suffering, when I find myself between two periods of suffering, I live as if I weren't alive. Far from being an individual packed with bone, muscle, flesh, organs, memory, purpose, I'm ready to believe myself, so feeble and undetermined is my feeling for life, a microscopic single-celled being, hanging by a thread and floating in the drift between heaven and earth, in an unlimited space, blown by winds, and even then, not distinctly.

THE NIGHTMARE

The nightmare was so dark that my head charred. In that state, I was afraid that it would crumble. New danger . . .

TOOTHED HEAD

Toothed in a circle. And it engages. With what? With other heads. Also with teeth. Head gears, circular gears. What dervish dance does as much? Dance by head, by axle, and I make them turn in the infernal gears. Me with. The movement accelerates. I accelerate it still more and the machine with toothed heads dully hums.

CARING FOR ONE'S BODY

What a funny Narcissus I make: I scalp myself. I flay myself. From feet to head, from feet to brow, I tear myself like a suffering peel. And so I martyr myself. Why? A need for activity. So what to do? I flay myself. I'm not imaginative enough for happiness.

And why me? I never think of flaying anyone other than myself. Something to think about, perhaps . . .

UNDER THE POTTER'S FINGERS

I'm the one who's the potter. Under my domineering finger which, like the trepan in the rock, enters without resistance, I hollow myself out.

My head, my only head, under the continual pressure, pushes in, gives way, becomes a cavity, a new and disturbing navel.

I also spin discs, but soon I'm the pancake of the disc and the imperturbable needle digs into me, digs into my skull, digs into my knee, which it pierces all the way to its synovial fluid.

Wheel of flesh, how can I take pleasure in this deplorable occupation? But the work is under way. How could I stop it now?

ON ALL FOURS

The moment you lose the center in yourself, you may as well be a toad as be a man, a little mass waiting for a kick.

Four-legged animal. Such am I. Such I become. Born of my weakness. No longer lining up (along my lines of inner strength, now trembling or even destroyed) with my bipedal organism, I find better support on four legs.

Fatigue at first. Fatigue. Then I am neither man, nor sand, but more sand than man. Then more sand than anything else. Then extension. Fatigue. Fatigue. Within myself, I extend. I abandon myself to an extreme

extension. I have to arrive to rest. It will be on legs, exactly on four stacks of little discs.

Isn't there a simpler model for legs? Perhaps. Perhaps. Ah well! The main thing is done. The infernal effort to always remain a man, and here I am liberated from it.

With what pleasure, stretched out now on long, fine legs, my body meanders softly along on its stilted legs.

TAHAVI

Tahavi goes to the Void. Tahavi hates the Void. It terrifies Tahavi, the Void does. But the Void came to Tahavi.

The Enormous Veil, he hasn't pushed it back. He wasn't able to push back the Enormous Veil.

When he was ten, he was sixty. His parents seemed like children to him. When he was five, he lost his way in the night of time.

He forgot himself in an ant. He forgot himself in a leaf. He forgot himself in the burial of childhood.

Tahavi hasn't found his bread. Tahavi hasn't found his father. Tahavi doesn't find his father in the tears of men.

Did not accept, Tahavi. Having received, did not keep. Through the door, through the window, Tahavi rejected.

Through his will supported by his breath, through the thought without breath, through his demons, Tahavi rejected.

In the dark, in the evening shall his memory be
in what suffers, in what oozes
in what seeks and doesn't find
in the unloading barge bursting on the shore
in the whistling departure of the tracer bullet
in the sulfur isle shall his memory be.

In he whose fever is in himself and for whom walls
don't matter
in he who dashes forward, with a head only against
walls
in the unrepentant thief
in the forever recalcitrant man of no will
in the torn-open porch shall his memory be.

In the road that haunts
in the heart seeking its beach
in the lover whose body has fled
in the traveler gnawed at by space.

In the tunnel
in the torment turning on itself
in the unruffled one who dares crumple the
cemetery.

In the inflamed orbit of stars that collide and burst
in the phantom ship, in the faded fiancée
in the crepuscular song shall his memory be.

In the presence of the sea
in the distance of the judge
in blindness
in the poisoned cup.

In the captain of the seven seas
in the soul of he who washes the dagger
in the reed organ that weeps for an entire people
in the day of spit on the offering.

In the fruit of winter
in the lung of battles that resume
in the madman in the rowboat.

In the twisted arms of never-satisfied desires
shall his memory be.

AND IT'S STILL

And it's still the piercing of the lance
the swarm of wasps swooping into the eye
the leper
and it's still the open flank

and it's still the one buried alive
and it's still the broken tabernacle
the arm as weak as an eyelash fighting the flood
and it's still the night returning
the space empty but watching

and it's still the old strap
and it's still the one buried alive
and it's still the collapsed balcony.
The pinched nerve in the depth of the heart
remembering
the baobab-bird whipping the brain
the torrent into which being hurls itself
and it's still the encounter in the storm
and it's still the edge of the eclipse
and it's still behind the palisade of cells
the horizon receding, receding . . .

PORTRAIT

Rock drill
Hammer drill
salt dwelling
inside a turtledove
Hedgehog of shivers.

SLEEP

Mouth of night, that releases the judge
Sleep, vice, watering trough
Come, sleep.

ADOLESCENCE

Shackles, childhood, toppling moors
swim through water lilies
to the adult hauling pulleys
Balcony, heavy balcony where at its tower
at last playing cactus games with young girls . . .

THE NOTION REVEALED

The seconds join forces
bells of the younger sister.

THE PAINTER AND THE MODEL

The Spaniard leans on the bull's balls
and he tramples la Duse
Peace broken by a greedy grip
Cut in the lemon
Comb of cries
Sneezed face
from the summit of the unconquered woman
dazed eternal
faced with uniquity.
On the triangles of the distraught woman
he then sketches out a green dress.

PORTRAIT OF THE MEIDOSEMS

Besides, like all Meidosemmes, she dreams only of entering the Palace of Confetti.

•

And as he looks at her, he impregnates her with a soul child.

•

Deserted immensity. Equally deserted castle. Haughty, but deserted. And his child dangles in the wind, in the rain.

Why? Because he couldn't bring him home alive. He doesn't know how to, in any case. And his child dangles in the wind and in the rain. In this destitution he lives. Meagerly.

And from this they both suffer. But they can't change a situation that so badly needs changing.

Now U.L. This is the relationship he has with his own. His child is not so far from him. No more than ten

paces. Which isn't much better. Barely at all, if he notices him. From time to time he tells him, "Shh! Shh!" That's it. They have no other exchange. It isn't very comforting. No, it isn't very comforting, "Shh! Shh!" Cried out with bated breath, for that matter. Of little help. But some, all the same, yes, of some.

The Meidosems have still other unfortunate ways of dealing with their soul children. Those will need some discussion. There aren't many happy soul children.

•

The clock that beats the passions in the soul of the Meidosems awakens. Its tempo accelerates. Around it the world hurries, hastens, moving toward a suddenly distinct destiny.

The spasmodic knife attacks, and the staff churning the depths moves about violently.

•

Can thirty-four tangled spears compose a being? Yes, a Meidosem. A Meidosem suffering, a Meidosem who no longer knows where to go, who no longer knows how to behave, how to cope, who no longer knows how to be anything other than a Meidosem.

They've destroyed his "one."

But he's not yet defeated. The spears that should serve him usefully against so many enemies, he's passed them first through his body.

But he's not yet defeated.

•

They take the form of bubbles in order to dream, they take the form of lianas in order to be moved.

Leaning against a wall, a wall, for that matter, that no one will ever see again, is a form made of a long rope. It intertwines.

That's all. It's a Meidosemme.

And she waits, sagging slightly, but much less so than any other rope of her size supporting itself would.

She waits.

Days, years, now pass. She waits.

•

The extreme elasticity of the Meidosems, that's the source of their joy. Of their unhappiness as well.

Some bundles fallen from a cart, a dangling wire, a sponge that's absorbing and already almost full, another empty and dry, condensation on a mirror, a phosphorescent trace, look carefully, look. Perhaps it's a Meidosem. Perhaps they're all Meidosems . . . seized, pricked, swollen, hardened, by a variety of feelings . . .

•

That herd that's coming, like slow pachyderms, advancing single file, their mass is and is not. What could they do about it? How would they carry it? That heaviness, that stiff gait is only something they've taken on to escape their lightness, which eventually terrifies them.

And so goes the procession of enormous bladders, trying to deceive themselves.

•

On her long legs, thin and curved, tall, gracious Meidosemme.

Dream of victorious races, soul of regrets and projects, soul plain and simple.

And distraught, she rushes into a space that drinks her up disinterestedly.

•

Those hundreds of wires trembling with electric spasmodic shudders, it is with this uncertain wire mesh for a face that the anguished Meidosem tries to calmly consider the massive world that surrounds him.

It's what he has to respond with to the world, the way a tinkling bell responds.

While, shaken by calls, struck and struck again, called and called again, he yearns for a Sunday, a real Sunday, still yet to come.

•

There he is, rushing off like a shell. A speed that the eye cannot follow. What will happen? He'll break into a hundred pieces on arrival, without question, and in blood. Oh, no, he hasn't even left.

He's only set out on his soul walk.

•

This afternoon is when the Meidosemmes relax. They climb into the trees. Not by means of the branches, but through the sap.

What little fixed form they had, dead tired, they're going to lose in the branches, in the leaves and the moss and in the penduncles.

Drunken ascent, soft as soap entering filth. Quickly into the sward, slowly into the old aspens. Suavely into the flowers. Under the minute but strong inhalation of butterfly trunks, they move no more.

Then they descend through the roots into the friendly earth, abundant in many things for those who know how to take hold of it.

Joy, joy that seizes the way panic seizes, joy as if under a blanket.

Then they have to bring back to the ground the little Meidosems, who are lost, overcome in the trees, and unable to detach themselves.

To threaten them, or even humiliate them. So they return, detached and brought back without difficulty, filled with plant juice and resentment.

•

In the ice, the cords of their nerves are in the ice.

Their stroll there is brief, worked over by shooting pain, by steel barbs along the path back to the cold of Nothingness.

The head dies, the bones rot. And the flesh, who still speaks of the flesh? Who still expects anything of the flesh?

Yet he lives.

The clock turns, the hour stops. The gut of the drama, there it is.

Without having to run to it, there it is . . .

The marble sweats, the afternoon grows dark.

Yet he lives . . .

•

Oh! She doesn't play to laugh. She plays to keep hold, to restrain herself.

Moon that hooks on, moon that unhooks.

She bets a marble against an ox and she loses a camel.

Mistake? Oh, no, there are no mistakes in the fatal circle.

There's no laughter. No place for laughter. Mobilized only to suffer, to endure.

The tub of tears is full to the brim.

•

The Meidosem like a rocket ignites. The Meidosem like a rocket takes off.

Come, he'll return.

Maybe not at the same speed, but he'll return, pulled back by the fibers attached to the capsules.

•

She sings, she who doesn't want to scream. She sings because she is proud. But one must know how to hear her. Such is her song, screamed profoundly into silence.

•

A scab of sparks itches a painful skull. It's a Meidosem. It's a racing grief. It's a rolling flight. It's the cripple of the air that moves about, distraught. Can't we help him?

No!

•

They've put on gloves to meet.

In the glove, we find a hand, a bone, a sword, a brother, a sister, a light, it depends on the Meidosems, on the day, on chance.

In the mouth we find a tongue, an appetite, words, a gentleness, water in the well, the well in the Earth. It depends on the Meidosems, on the day, on chance.

In the cathedral of the Meidosems' mouth, they also snap pennants.

•

A sky of copper covers him. A city of sugar laughs at him. What's he to do? He won't melt the city. He can't pierce the copper.

Give up, little Meidosem.

Give up, you'll completely lose your substance if you keep at it . . .

•

He's pleasing, and yet . . .

He sleeps on horseback in his immense grief. His path is the circular horizon and the pierced Tower of the astronomical sky.

He's pleasing. His unperceived horizon enlarges the other Meidosems, who ask, "What's happening? So what's happening? . . . ," feeling the strangeness, the enlargement of his approach.

And yet, he sleeps on horseback in his immense grief . . .

•

This young Meidosemme is covered in flags. Her face says nothing but "Look at my flags." And they are so clean that it's quite joyful, and you think, "What is this Meidosemme flag-bearer?" Because these are, whether she realizes it or not, flags that say nothing.

Another thing, you can see underneath, if you're the one who's called upon to look, what she herself barely guesses, so preoccupied is she with her bunting.

•

Danger! You need to flee. You must. Quick.

He will not flee. His tyrannical right won't let him.

But he must. He doesn't want his tyrannical right. His terrifying left moves about, twists in agony, screams. Useless, he doesn't want his tyrannical right. And so dies the Meidosem who, indivisible, could have fled.

Life ends. There's nothing left. But if we really want to, we could make a story of it.

•

However great is their ability to stretch themselves and pass elastically from one form to another, those large filamentary apes seek one larger still, one faster, provided it won't be for long, and that they are sure of returning to their original state. And for that the Meidosems go off joyful or fascinated, to the places where they have been promised a great extension, to live more intensely, and from there, excited, they depart for places where a similar promise has been made.

•

Flows of affection, of infection, flows of the vassals of suffering, bitter caramel of other times, stalagmites slowly formed, it is with these flows that he walks, with them that he waits, spongy limbs sprung from the head, pierced by a thousand small crosscurrents, dropping to the ground, extravasated, like blood bursting arterioles, but it's not blood, it's the blood of memories, of

the soul's piercing, of the fragile central chamber, struggling in the tow, it's the reddened water of the memory vein, flowing without direction, but not without reason, through its little innards, leaking everywhere; tiny, multiple punctures.

A Meidosem bursts. A thousand veinules of his faith burst within him. He falls again, spreads out and extravasates into new penumbrae, into new pools.

How difficult it is to walk like this . . .

•

Here is the face bearing chains.

A rosary of links holds him by the eyes, wraps around his neck, falls down, tears, makes him suffer the weight of the links combined with the weight of slavery.

The long shadow it casts says a lot about it.

Time! Oh, time! All the time that is yours, that would've been yours . . .

•

Scattered organs, broken races, intentions trapped in stone. The solid has you. In shards of yourself. The solid you so desired has you at last.

Dislocated, in pieces, knees of momentum. Strange meidosem palisade.

•

More arms than an octopus, legs and hands crisscrossing up to the neck, the Meidosem.

But for all that, not radiant. Quite the contrary: tortured, tense, anxious, and finding nothing of importance to seize, watching, watching endlessly, head studded with suckers.

•

Meidosem, with a head garbed in arborescences, watching not through sunken eyes but through the grief of their loss and through the piercing suffering.

An infinite arborescence . . . under the translucent thinness of the exhausted face, a pierced life is expressed, over another one that takes shape, that takes shape, arduous, prudent, tapering, and already pierced again.

•

Tall, tall Meidosem, but not so tall after all when you see his head. Meidosem with the scorched face.

What burned you so, swarthy one?

Is it yesterday? No, it's today. Each today.

And it resents everyone.
Scorched as it is, isn't that natural?

•

The long diagonal spear that, from top to bottom of the weakening Meidosem, is implanted to hold him up. Will it hold him up in the end?

From forehead to knee, large crutch without marrow. Imperious crossbar, of military hardness.

Ferocious stake, do you mean to kill or support?

•

Christ wasn't the only one crucified. This one was too, Meidosem inscribed in the barbed polygon of the Present without exit.

Well beyond a judge's sentence, well beyond the collapse of cities.

The fullness of his wound isolates him from the accident.

He suffers the way one reigns.

•

Round thighs, round chest, round head. But those eyes? Oblique, slumped, pierced. But between the two eyes?

So big, so big, so empty. To swallow what, with that emptiness?

Lizard tenacious and hard like a lookout, he waits, this Meidosem. Without batting an eyelash, in the hope of being filled, he waits . . .

•

Weakly supported, always weakly supported, there they are again, their column of vertebrae (are those even vertebrae?) showing through the ectoplasm of their being.

They shouldn't go far.

No, they'll go far, screwed to their weakness, in some way strong for it and almost invincible . . .

•

On a soft body, a head of prey and of capture, of past domination, like a tractor stopped one afternoon in the furrows of a field not yet completely plowed.

Macle of shards, of crystals, of blocks.

The light strikes straight down, departs straightaway, doesn't enter anywhere.

The fierce, stony nucleus awaits, on a vague body, foreign, heterogeneous, the healthy cleavage that opens it and finally relieves it.

•

Hooks of pain, you've dug in here. Yet the Meidosem had immediately made a buffer. Laughable resistance! Palisade of skin against the teeth of tigers. Well . . . maybe this time it'll be enough.

•

Bovine Buddha of his beast . . .

The lower world meditates within him without undoing his curves, and the Meidosem grazes, the invisible grass of his pains put back in their place.

He rules? No, he just hasn't been equaled.

•

Feminine demons of the arousal of desire's ink, triangular face in hairs of temptation, where pierces, where runs a hundred rainy gazes, a hundred fetching gazes, gazes for returned gazes. Little black spider, dwarfish and spitting slowly, to stop time for a moment.

•

From an air sedan, or a small unknown bit of ground concealed in some ionosphere a small troop of naked Meidosems descended, some tied to parachutes, others to a few pieces of string or to a plunging clod of dirt, others not hitched to anything.

Lightweight, fibers and threads cast behind them, these Meidosems descended diagonally (doubtlessly adrift to a certain degree), hands at rest, pressed against their leg.

Falling just to fall, they prefer to fall wisely, to slightly drift.

No, not worried, falling calmly, calmly, limbs stretched out, stretched out. Without a second thought. What good is there in worrying already? They still have several seconds before they break apart.

•

Here it is, the indivisible knot, and it's a Meidosem. All eruption, if we listen to it, but it's an indivisible knot.

Deeply, inextricably knotted. His leg ceasing to be a leg, if it had ever been one, terminal sweep from a clenched chest that also displays the rope and the jute.

What strangled being doesn't talk about freeing itself one day? The tables themselves talk, or so they say, of liberating themselves from their fibers.

•

Taut insect-head spherule, dragonfly head, borne high in a dancing gait, at a peasant pace.

And always this worried head, like the one the mouse bears on its body before some poisoned cheese, some scattered seeds and discarded fabrics.

Millstone head.

•

Here a cloud makes a nose, a large nose widely spread, like the odor around it, forms an eye as well, which is like a landscape, its landscape before it, and now within it, in the giant head, which grows, grows inordinately large.

•

From fog to flesh, infinite are the passages in Meidosem country . . .

•

Profiles in the form of reproaches, profiles in the form of a young girl's disappointed hopes, such are the profiles of Meidosems.

Concave above all, sadly concave, but not crying.

No acceptance of hardship, no acceptance of tears. No acceptance.

You can only catch a glimpse of the Meidosems.

•

A blindfold over his eyes, a tight blindfold, sewn over his eye, falling inexorably like an iron shutter dropping over a window. But it's *with* his blindfold that he sees. It is with all his sewing that he unsews, that he resews, with his lack that he possesses, that he takes.

•

In his body constricted to feel resonance, straining toward a world in which even sweat is sonorous, he seeks the traveler's drama that circulates unceasingly around him and around all his worried meidosem brothers who don't know what to seize.

•

When they worry, their head hollows out, into a bowl, a tub, but empty, increasingly empty, though increasingly large, almost bursting their skull.

When they are displeased by two things and have to choose and decide between them, when, faced with two alternatives, each one disagreeable and likely to generate other disagreeable inconveniences that are difficult to discern in advance, they are unable to prefer one over the other, which goes on, as it were, to continuously ring the bell, they then react by retreating further and further

into their head, which doesn't make the void before the worrisome problem any less worrisome, painful void that fills everything, sphere of nothingness.

•

A sort of curved spear emerges from his nose. It has just taken form. It's a balancing pole.

The Meidosems almost always need balancing poles, though they often get very much in their way, as you can imagine, both when walking or running; and when meeting with others.

You'll often see Meidosems at a complete stop, when there's no need to stop, except that their balancing poles are caught in beams, in stakes, or in the balconies of houses, or just simply in each other's balancing poles, and they can't move forward, are perhaps waiting to perish or to be freed at great risk by some butterfingers who brings about through various accidents the liberating Accident.

To avoid falling into such balancing-pole traps, they prefer to move in procession rather than alone or in disorganized groups.

•

A young Meidosem folds up, folds up again, withdraws to whatever degree possible, jumping back like a lasso.

But the terrible animated tower that threatens him, leaning over him like the imminent collapse of a building onto the canopy of a little pavilion . . .

But the terrible tower . . . in this flannel moment . . .

•

Soul rock. Against it, no recourse. None to be found. No way around it. None to be found.

At this point, they would stumble if they moved forward, and it's nothing but wind, a confluence of winds.

•

There, going back up the river of mud, mounted on a solid horse, he hopes to reach the sea of mud that will submerge what must be submerged. Eyes fixed on the estuary where he thinks he sees the first buoys floating, signs of the vast enlargement that's going to liberate him, the way the dark can liberate.

•

A mouse escapes, nibbles the finger of an old glove. "What are you doing there, mouse?" "I am the eagle of tomorrow," it replies, and immediately the Meidosems flee, terrified. The imperious beak develops rapidly. To save yourself, you'll have to move quickly now.

•

He changes into waterfalls, into fissures, into fire. To be a Meidosem is to change like this, into shifting iridescences.

Why?

At least these aren't wounds. And so goes the Meidosem. Better glints and plays of sunlight and shadow than suffer, than meditate. Better waterfalls.

•

Oh owl-dormitories of unstifling breath. They come here, exhausted Meidosems, led by the thread that goes from the feminine to larceny, from birth to decay, from joy to clay, from air to nitrogen.

They ended up here. There's nothing to add.

•

Meidosem who flies away on a curtain, returns by cistern.

Meidosem who throws himself into a stream, finds himself in a pond. Oh strange, strange nature of the Meidosems.

•

The paws on which he runs to the end of the world aren't hairy, aren't supported by bone, aren't attached to a solid, circular pelvis.

They're like erasers, like boredom that runs.

The dew of prairie grass doesn't stick to them.

The paws on which Meidosems run aren't the paws animals like to sprint on, when their victim's in view and well in their throes . . . when the victim's been reached.

No, they aren't that kind of paw.

•

And here are some of the places where the Meidosems live, strange, actually; strange that they agree to live there . . .

•

It must be said, they live mostly in concentration camps.

The concentration camps in which these Meidosems live, they don't have to live in them. But they worry about how they would live if they were no longer there. They're afraid of getting bored outside. They're beaten, they're brutalized, they're tortured. But they're afraid of getting bored outside.

•

Here a hilly plain, wildly stretching to the Meidosem, who stops, stunned, dropping what he was working on, in which he had nonetheless been deeply absorbed, dropping everything to submit to the fatal fascination.

The elastics of his being tighten, swell.

It's perhaps not as dangerous as you'd think.

•

A rope in a tower, he rolls himself up in the rope. Done! He realizes that a mistake's been made. He rolls himself up in the tower. He realizes a mistake's been made. It bends, it twists. It needs to be straightened out. He receives three monkeys and shows them around the tower. The monkeys get agitated and the reception isn't perfect. Yet the tower is there, he has to climb up, he has to climb down, he has to climb back up with two monkeys in his arms and a third that goes after his hair. But the Meidosem is more distracted than the monkey. The Meidosem is still thinking of something else.

This frail dream gets frailer yet when, reaching the end of the agitation of his several threads, after a relatively short period of time, it will be as if it never happened.

While waiting, other towers are needed. To see at a greater distance. To be able to worry at a greater distance.

•

Through shattered ceilings surge avid heads, curious, frightened, the heads of Meidosems.

Through chimneys, through cracks, through anything that can hold a viewing apparatus.

In the house, in the room, between the slats (and there are hundreds of little slats per door), Meidosems appear, Meidosems disappear, appear again, disappear again.

Quickly here, quickly gone, the ferreting Meidosems . . .

•

Here is the old palace with its long corridors in which chickens peck, where a donkey sticks in its head. Such is the old palace. It holds over a thousand Meidosems, well over a thousand.

Everything's neglected. No one is served. No one has what they need. The roof is bad. All they have, which they have in common, which they never let go of, are four bad ropes.

Without them, even in the palace, they would not be at ease. As for leaving without them, out of the question. They'd be terrified. And they're already terrified when they're holding them in their hands, terrified

someone may cut them. And someone cuts them. Everyone immediately rushes to tie the cut pieces back together, they get muddled, fall down, make threats.

There are many other ropes. But with the others, they would be afraid of strangling themselves by accident.

•

Here is the city of walls. But roofs? No roofs. Houses? No houses. Here is the city of walls. Maps in their hands, you constantly see Meidosems looking for a way out. But they never leave.

Because of the births (and the mummified dead take up even more space between the walls), because of the births, always more people. They have to build new walls between already existing walls.

There are long meidosem discussions within the walls, on That which shall be without walls, without limit, without end, and even without beginning.

•

What meidosem landscape is without ladders? Everywhere, all the way to the horizon, ladders, ladders . . . and everywhere the heads of Meidosems who've climbed them.

Satisfied, vexed, eager, worried, greedy, brave, serious, displeased.

The Meidosems below who move among the ladders work, support families, pay, pay collectors of every sort, who constantly arrive. It's said of them that they don't heed the ladder's call.

•

To converse with the vultures and with the eagles who pass over high above, they build large trees of firm matter, higher than any other tree, much higher, and capable, they believe, of making the birds themselves dream and of making them understand directly how alike they are, Meidosems and birds.

But the birds don't get taken in, apart from a few sparrow "stiplings" that build their nest on a spear, provided there are Meidosems near and some food and some agitation of no consequence.

Sometimes there's a report of a flight of island birds or a migratory bunch, who rest on the highest branches to chatter away for a few moments and then depart without seeking any contact with the Meidosems who are disappointed, but never completely disappointed, and who continue to wait.

•

He stretches the surface of his body to find his way.

He renounces the presence of himself to find his way.

He dresses some voids in a shirt for, before the other Void, a small semblance of fullness.

•

The climbing stalks on which they perch lead to an open terrace. There are many climbing stalks. They don't make a sound. There are many terraces. But they're never anything more than terraces, and sooner or later one must climb down again because of the things one needs.

Then, quick, climb back up.

Most efforts go into looking for climbing stalks. Not everyone has one of their own. Anyone impatient has to go with someone else who makes his own stalk work, a large one that carries a great quantity of Meidosems.

Reaching the top, the other is paid in sounds. A terrifying racket from such or such terrace, if it's spacious. For that matter, nearly every terrace is a liberator of yells.

•

On a roof, there is always a Meidosem. On a promontory, there are always Meidosems.

They can't stay on the ground. They can't enjoy themselves there.

As soon as they've eaten, they return to the heights, to the worthless heights.

•

On a large bare rock, what is he waiting for, this Meidosem? He's waiting for whirlwinds. In those whirlwinds of tangled, frantic Meidosems is joy; now the meidosemme germination grows with excitment.

Other Meidosems wait further off, light threads who wish to entangle themselves with other threads, who wait for those who are frayed in the same way, who move in flocks carried along by the wind, who themselves wait for a current to lift them, raise them up and allow them to join either a group of the isolated or a larger troop of "Meidosems of the air."

Sometimes it so happens that they encounter the seaweed of souls. Mysterious is their exchange, but it exists.

Shivers, cyclonic fits of anger, such are the risks of air. These are the joys of air. How not to get carried away by a high meidosemme squall?

It probably has to end.

Indeed, Meidosems constantly fall from the sky. You grow almost indifferent to it. You have to be a relation to care. Some people watch the sky just to see them fall.

•

Wings without heads, without birds, pure wings of every body flying toward a solar sky, still not resplendent, but fighting to be resplendent, drilling a path through the empyrean like a cannon-shell of future bliss.

Silence. Flights.

What the Meidosems have so desired, at last they've reached. There they are.

INDESCRIBABLE PLACES

I

Two poplars are losing their leaves, losing forever their last yellowy leaves.

Passersby are rare and a cold seizes their very soul, urging them to move farther away.

A fir tree lies in wait for a woman behind a door. What will happen? Eh? It depends on the time, it depends on the hat that she draws from a partly hidden doorframe to put on, to go out and strut about, if she can, if she can only forget . . .

The countryside sleeps. The city is dead.

The shadows of an evening that's come too soon and does not end, and will never end, stretch, stretch.

A car more encrusted in immobility than the wall of an ancient fortress stands in an unchanged space, forever unchanged. Gloom lives here. A solemn clock marks the hours that no longer count.

II

A great movement of *écorchés* among the marble statues. Cautious, extremely cautious, they advance, hands stretched forward, because even a hair, a single long hair rushing to meet them would make them jump terribly.

Suffering! Suffering! And yet they must walk, they must keep walking.

The profile of the cruel Lord continually passes over the lengthy wall.

A marble rings out. Here is a marble resounding, scattering disarray through its clear noise, through its pure noise, a welcome sound to a schoolboy's ears, a marble that would have to be avoided in time, however painful it may be to flee. Falling marble, perhaps to be followed by others. From where it was thrown, there could be more. Others, hundreds of others. From where? Well, from wherever someone took some pleasure in throwing this one, as a peace-trap, onto this courtyard,

where there had already not been much peace to be found.

Here is where the march of the bloodied took place. A storm now breaks. Among these marble statues? Who would have believed it? A rope storm! What new supplement of pain for those who seem to have already been satisfied by the torture of flaying. Danger! Danger! Who whips the flayed man who cannot run! An invisible pallor in the redness of their raw flesh, a pallor nonetheless suddenly sweeps over their working soul (through the last hope lodged in them, facing their cursed lot, which could thus be even more cursed).

Danger! Danger! they yell at you, wandering pieces of steak with hunted looks. What to do? What brakes applied in a brow, and then what ultra-rapid, ultra-efficient action will stop the imminent cataclysm?

Well, now it's raining. What was I saying? It's raining little balls of lead, no, little balls of beautiful, gleaming metal. They don't all reach their goal . . . if there really is one.

Some balls chime on this marble statue. Oh, how it rings, virginal, marvelous, made to stir up a flight of beautiful feelings. I'm speaking of the sound, of course, solely of the sound, for the one who would hear it, sheltered away, sheltered from all the drop points to come.

•

Here is the place of the dreary and of the coiled and of indefinite recovery.

A woman removes a shirt, which reveals another shirt, which she removes, which reveals another shirt, which she removes, which reveals another shirt, which she removes, which reveals another shirt, and the calm of nudity never arrives.

•

Two giant babies, extremely slow, with a sleepy grip, hold each other motionless.

Slow combat that lasts years.

One pushes the other's head back with a hand at once powerful and hesitant, which by pressing continually on the anterior fontanel pushes his imprint into the supple hollow of the gigantic, soft skull, under which a brain undoubtedly reflects laboriously over a distant counterattack.

And all of this swims in the water of a smooth, shallow marsh.

•

There is no breeze in the city. The vehicles are parked, permanently parked.

No shouts, no desires. From a split statue, three pieces fly, turning on one another in anger, as if lifted by unpardonable reproaches.

The funereal city has no exit, dead streets cross and close in on themselves. A miry, blackish liquid fills the canals with a humid, nauseating odor hostile to lungs and bones, and to the conservation of human life, comes as a traitor to invade the city with large zones unfriendly to man.

One hears at a distance the advance of the disgruntled sea and sometimes an anxious boat demanding entrance to the port. The channel cluttered with the debris of earlier disasters, some of it just above the water's surface, some of it buried in the mud, is menacing and dark.

And it is still, and it is always the hell of the unchangeable sojourn.

Some dogs without leashes, but not without fangs, weep by howling for a ferocious master, beside a fresh tomb. There's a great yell from some low register.

•

There, a sleepwalking street in its turn strolls through the night, winding along without waking, perhaps shed by a hidden thought.

Winding in this way, the dark little street encounters another sleepwalking street, which stretches alongside it . . . They're hesitant to intersect. They're hesitant to seize one another.

Several humans wake up, anguished, in the vagrant street, as the winding movement continues to increase and at last enlaces and entangles the streets with the clusters of horrified women at the windows, and coils them up together in multiple loops until a deep sleep overcomes those interminable strollers who won't be found in their usual places tomorrow. One can assume as much, at any rate.

•

Here again the fortresses with leaning towers, here again the time of disquiet, the time of the summit of summits, the time of the nothingness that balances the whole. Oh, who will give a sign? A true one, one that helps? A sign equal to the discord?

Waiting. Infinite waiting. A child wanting to be courageous splashes himself with the blood of a decapitated turkey. A tall mechanical woman on the Grand Place kneads a dwarf, who kneads a stomach. A little man watches, then moves off. Quickly. Something warned

him that there is antinomy between her and him. Bravo! You're leaving in time. Yet he's unable to refrain from dallying several minutes longer at a convenient distance to learn something about the jug. A mistake! A big mistake, I'm telling you. Too late now.

Well, little man, now you're caught, it would seem . . . And the hand having deftly grabbed him immediately starts working him over, indifferently mixing him in with the previous ingredients.

•

The Castle is no more. The somber lane remains. The somber lane, the grenadier's daughter is there. You'll recognize her by her walk. You'll recognize her by her mount.

The horse she mounts, its hooves surrounded by coiled serpents, and adorned with torn strips of its own falling, bloody coat, the wretched horse she mounts, covered in the putrid exterior of its suffering body that slips off and comes loose in patches, still rules with a skittish air, with an immense and crazy head, with a wild eye, rules in vain a destiny that is by all appearances a burdensome one.

Oh, young, haughty woman, you'll have to come down off that horse, young, haughty woman! You'll have to.

•

The gloomy Park; running wildly through the gloomy Park, the tombs spitting out the jaws of skulls, looking down and at the fallen crosses, the young disheveled girl struggles to hold onto her reason.

The bricks weep, the walls collapse. Is it time for the resurrection of the flesh? Not yet. Not yet.

A large table is set. A large bare table. Bare save for a few knives, a few people, weary and preoccupied, sitting side by side, faced with an insufficient number of place settings, side by side but separated by the precipice of what is not the self. No bread is offered them.

If life gains nothing, death takes no one. What's there to complain about? On the ground, a man lies, shaken by convulsions, but no one pays any attention. A gallows is also dressed for an execution that surely won't be long in coming, but no one pays any attention. Someone with his head lying on the table scribbles out mathematic formulas for the horoscope of a prince he believes he's going to know, another with a knife slashes the wrist he obstinately accuses of having betrayed him. But nobody pays any attention. Each absorbed in what they're doing, each alone in their drifting, at the large, long table of the gloomy Park on the Esplanade of the deserted chateau.

•

In the clearing, a picklock bird of prey with swollen feathers admires the woman arched on a cross, sodomized by terror. The bird, greedy like all those with such long, such hooked beaks, the bird, slow like all those with such a considerable mass to move, the bird, contemplative like all those whose wingspan dimensions settle into an armchair on columns ascending to the airy heights, the bird watches her. Strange, a woman; strange, and how it resembles entrails!

There is in the clearing, then, a frightening moment.

•

Near the cemetery, in the camp surrounded by barbed wire, there is no pleasure to be had in the house of the women of pleasure. A leper guards them. Sometimes a man wrapped in bandages appears at the entrance and the women recoil, trembling. If the leper is there, there's a dispute. Terrible, this dispute!

A wounded man losing blood, stomach swollen with greenish pus, stinking, is presented on a stretcher to the ladies of love. How to say "Yes"? Dreadful problem. He sits up with difficulty. How to say "No"? There is a deathly silence among them. There is a silence that lasts too long among these people. Now a sort of unspoken secret meeting between the carriers. The music has stopped and the flasks of perfume on the dressing tables look strange to those who would consider them. The

music has stopped. Some shuffling can be heard, some pages crumpled, some shuffling. Don't look out the windows, ladies, don't look out the windows. The whole camp is surrounded by heavy stretchers with menacing nurses who want to stop, stretchers of exhausted wounded men, rings under their eyes, rings very different from yours, ladies. Oh, the sweat of those suffering bodies, suffering so differently from you.

But the music arranges everything, the music that had stopped either through modesty or mistake is now called for again. Gentle harps, under the soft columns of the salon, listlessly worked over, worked over to provide softness to the body, pink harps, buttressed pianos which they call grand, lilting cellos converge on the great trituration of bodies that mingle and regret not being able to mingle and interpenetrate even more. But the wall opens and ruin is in the building. It's true. This is certain. Soon air will be able to come in from outside.

It will have to be better kept in the future, the house of the ladies of pleasure.

Then all the women are court-martialed again.

Women are always court-martialed.

•

Here are engraved the curses against the desecrators of Silence. A commanding gesture in the stone accompanies them without their being aware of it. The unmoving

granite keeps watch and the flagstones that they thoughtlessly tread, and the rocks on the donkey's back ready to fall onto desecrators with the flowing words.

The careless man who uttered a rash word sinks into a network of fatal lines.

The problem of the onion who crosses the savanna in a dazed splutter, violent cavalryman of the earth-telescope, what does he say?

Onion, that's what he says. Onion. Father of waters, mother of rosaries and herds. Onion, that's what he says, what he shows, what he does, what he fills, what he knocks up, that's what.

Replace savanna with sheep, put in dazzlement for whatever you want, for splutter, replace rosaries with neon, put in some earth breads and low waters, slopes and sideways genuflections, and even so, what will he say? Onion, that's what he says, onion, existing to rule, existing to pursue, onion, in a word, onion that grows, onion that grows again. But not into a resemblance of what it may be, of her or of him. No! Onion. Only onion, and I don't fear tomorrow.

•

The weight of the Planet-Head, the weight of the planet-head, when borne on a weary body, engaged in the thick

clouds of the Epistral, the weight of the planet-head, then, like a threat of squadrons of aeronauts, weighs on the body, terrace that disintegrates and finds nothing to catch hold of, and which under the only light breaks like a sword on a knee. The weight of the planet-earth with its growing mass, nothing more can counterbalance it now, and the Globe pirate sails into the stormy ether.

OLD AGE OF POLLAGORAS

I would really like to know why I always follow the horse I hold by the reins.

With age, says Pollagoras, I have become like a field on which there was a battle, a battle centuries ago, a battle yesterday, a field of many battles.

Dead men never completely dead wander in silence or they rest. You would think they'd lost the desire to conquer.

But suddenly they come to life, those lying down stand up and, fully armed, attack. They have just encountered the phantom of their past adversary, who, shaken, suddenly rushes forward feverishly, ready to counterattack, forcing my surprised heart to beat more quickly in my chest and in my sullen being, which reluctantly comes to life.

They fight "their" battles without any interference, as blind to the ones that came before as to those still to come, through which, unknown and peaceful, heroes move until, encountering their contemporary adversary, they straighten up in an instant and charge irresistibly into combat.

It is in this manner, says Pollagoras, that I've aged, through this accumulation.

Encumbered by battles already fought, a clockwork of increasingly numerous scenes that *chime*, whereas I would rather be somewhere else.

And so, like a manor delivered over to the Poltergeist, I live without living, a place of hauntings that no longer interest me, even if they're still passionate and change tumultuously into a feverish unwinding I'm unable to bring to a halt.

•

Wisdom has not come, says Pollagoras. Speech dies more than before, but wisdom has not come.

Like a seismographic needle, my attention throughout my life has scoured me without delineating me, has sounded me out without giving me form.

At the dawn of old age before the plain of Death, I'm still seeking, I'm always seeking, says Pollagoras, the small, distant dam in my childhood, built by my pride, while with soft weapons and a tiny shield, I move among the cliffs of unknown adults.

Small dam that I built, believing it to be good, believing it to be magnificently good, and placing myself in an unassailable fortress. Small, overly solid dam that my resistance built.

And it's not the only one.

How many have I cemented together in the time of my mad defense, in my frightened years?

I must seek them all out now, covered over in living fibers.

My weakening life with but a trickle left to it, seeks eagerly, the torrents still being squandered, and the magnificent work of the courageous little builder must be ruined for the benefit of an old miser who's fond of life.

•

Leave me, says Pollagoras, I'm weary of the belligerent cowlick. My time has come. Leave. My blood has lost its colloidal. My entire being lays down stones.

The demolition began with the death of someone I lived with. This someone was a woman, which is to say, able to seep into every corridor of the soul.

She fell into Death. Suddenly. Without any consent.

Far from the shore, the sea withdrew.

The sandbank spread, spread and deepened, and a night appeared that frightened off my night, vast as it was, and with which I had long been covering myself from the unbearable day of others.

I quickly launched some rockets but the night swallowed them up without alteration, made the futile rockets disappear without lighting more than a few specks of dust, vanishing without a spray of sparks, without a burst, far from the dark face of the fireworks expert.

•

He came with the rains, my friend, the one it is said everyone has on their back.

He came with the rains, sad, and he still hasn't dried.

I've made several new starts since then. I've reached several new shores. But I haven't been able to unsadden him. I'm weary now. My strength, my remaining strength . . . his wet clothes—or are they already mine?—make me shiver. It will soon be time to go back.

Darren Jackson's poems and translations have appeared or are forthcoming in *Circumference*, *The Pinch*, *Smartish Pace*, *Iron Horse*, *Cimarron Review*, and other journals. He has been a VCCA Fellow in France and Virginia and received a PhD from the University of Tennessee in 2013.

Through travel journals, prose poems, and incantatory exorcisms, Henri Michaux (1899–1984) built a unique world of aggression, fear, hostility, and paranoia, whose fantastical lineaments and fabulist beings encountered on inner journeys (from the lands of the Hacs, the Cordobese, and the Emanglons to that of the delicately suffering Meidosems of the current volume) offer the reader a number of uncomfortably familiar mirrors to our psychological and cognitive discomfort with our contemporary environments. In 1956 he continued his controlled explorations of the self with a series of mescaline experiments, which he documented in a number of books over the following decade. Michaux's writing took form at an indefinable midpoint between mysticism and science, and was paralleled by his lifelong commitment to painting and drawing, a visual counterpart to his introspective exorcism.

Front cover:
Electron Micrograph of a Clean Merino Wool Fiber.
Image courtesy of CSIRO, a major science research organization of Australia.

Printed in the United States of America.

Life in the Folds, originally published in 1949, is perhaps Henri Michaux's most direct (and most violent) exploration of the many forms of suffering, a laboratory of fantastical aggression and destructive energies in which the poet presents his varied devices and methods for dealing with the world around him. The first two sections, written in 1946 shortly after the conclusion of World War II, offer such items as the Slapping Gun and the Man-Sling (in the section entitled "Freedom of Action") and depict scenarios that call for defensive measures such as "The Constellation of Pinpricks" or "The Trepanned Patient" (in the section entitled "Apparitions"). This volume also contains one of Michaux's more complex fantastical-ethnographical travelogues, "Portrait of the Meidosems," an account of the ways and manners of a population of vague ectoplasmic figures, anguished filaments of sorts that struggle to exist, yet like examined amoebic floaters, are never allowed to sit still.

Although Michaux was known for his extreme privacy and abhorrence of biographical detail, this volume also charts a turning point in his life and in the world, where his earlier depictions of visualized psychology and suffering found open representation in a traumatized Europe. Imbued by the years of war, the Occupation, and the horror of the concentration camps, *Life in the Folds* also bears the scars of Michaux's own personal catastrophe—the loss of his wife, who had died of "atrocious burns" the previous year—and concludes with the autobiographical text, "Old Age of Pollagoras," a wearied testament uttered before a haunted "plain of death."

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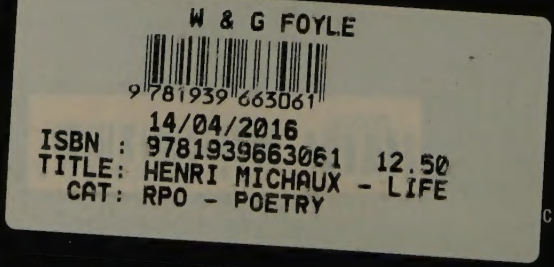

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